

The Exterior of the House

Unless there is a major landscaping or lawn project involved, it is probably best to save exterior fix-up for last. There are two main reasons for this. First, the first steps in preparing the interior of the house are easier. They also help develop the proper mind set required for selling - beginning to think of your "home" as a marketable commodity. Second, the exterior is the most important.

A homebuyer's first impression is based on his or her view of the house from the real estate agent's car. They call that first impression "curb appeal."

So take a walk across the street and take a good look at your house. Look at nearby houses, too, and see how yours compares. Then it may be time to go to work.

Landscaping

Is your landscaping at least average for the neighborhood? If it is not, buy a few bushes and plant them. Do not put in trees. Mature trees are expensive, and you will not get back your investment. Also, immature trees do not really add much to the appearance value of the home.

If you have an area for flowers, buy mature colorful flowers and plant them. They add a splash of vibrancy and color, creating a favorable first impression. Do not buy bulbs or seeds and plant them. They will not mature fast enough to create the desired effect and you certainly don't want a patch of brown earth for homebuyers to view.

Your lawn should be evenly cut, freshly edged, well watered, and free of brown spots. If there are problems with your lawn, you should probably take care of them before working on the inside of your home. This is because certain areas may need to be re-sod, and you want to give it a chance to grow so that re-sod areas are not immediately apparent. Plus, you might want to give fertilizer enough time to be effective.

Always rake up loose leaves and grass cuttings.

House Exterior

The big decision is whether to paint or not. When you look at your house from across the street, does it look tired and faded? If so, a paint job may be in order. It is often a very good investment and really spruces up the appearance of a house, adding dollars to offers from potential homebuyers.

When choosing a color, it should not be something garish and unusual, but a color that fits well in your neighborhood. Of course, the color also depends on the style of your house, too. For some reason, different shades of yellow seem to illicit the best response in homebuyers, whether it is in the trim or the basic color of the house.

As for the roof, if you know your roof leaks, repair it. If you do not repair a leaky roof, you are going to have to disclose it and the buyer will want an entire new roof. If you know your roof leaks and you don't repair it and don't disclose it, look forward to hearing from lawyers at some point in the future.

Otherwise, wait and see what the home inspector says. Why spend money unnecessarily?

The Back Yard

The back yard should be tidy. If you have a pool or spa, keep it freshly maintained and constantly cleaned. For those that have dogs, be sure to constantly keep the area clear of "debris." If you have swing sets or anything elaborate for your kids, it probably makes more sense to remove them than to leave them in place. They take up room, and you want your back yard to appear as spacious as possible, especially in newer homes where the yards are not as large.

The Front Door & Entryway

The front door should be especially sharp, since it is the entryway into the house. Polish the door fixture so it gleams. If the door needs refinishing or repainting, make sure to get that done.

If you have a cute little plaque or shingle with your family name on it, remove it, even if it is just on the mailbox. You can always put it up again on your new home. Get a new plush door mat, too. This is something else you can take with you once you move.

Make sure the locks work easily and the keys fit properly. When a homebuyer comes to visit your home, the agent uses the key from the lock box to unlock the door. If there is trouble working the lock while everyone else stands around twiddling their thumbs, this sends a negative first impression to prospective homebuyers.